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Elliot Abrams

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CBI and the U.S. National Interest

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Following is a statement by Elliot Abrams, Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, before the Subcommittee on Oversite of the House Ways and Means Committee, Washington, D.C., February 25, 1986.

I welcome this opportunity to testify today on the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI)—a major priority of the Department of State and the Administration.

The broad bipartisan support that marked the passage of the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act in 1983 reflected the consensus of the Congress and of the American people that U.S. interests require the political and economic well-being of the region. The CBI embodies the U.S. effort to contribute to the region's political stability, social tranquility, and economic growth and development. The CBI is a historic program, central to the achievement of our foreign policy objectives in the region.

Our own national self-interest generates a natural active concern over the stability of a region which is an immediate neighbor—in fact, our third border. Fifty percent of our trade—including most of our oil imports—passes through the Caribbean shipping lanes, including the Panama Canal.

The Caribbean Basin is the second largest source of illegal immigration into this country. Lack of jobs at home is the principal reason. In some Caribbean Basin countries unemployment is as high as 40%. We have a mutual interest that the peoples of the region have the opportunity to find useful employment in their domestic economies rather than being forced to seek jobs elsewhere.

We have a significant and expanding export interest in the region. It constitutes an important proximate market for our goods; last year, the CBI countries together absorbed $6.3 billion of our exports, making them our seventh largest market. (The CBI is a larger market, for example, than the U.S.S.R. plus Eastern Europe, than all of Africa, than France or Italy.) Likewise, we have important investments in the Caribbean Basin, amounting to $5.8 billion in nonfinancial investment (i.e., all industries except banking, finance, and insurance) at the end of 1984 (the latest available data). We share an interest with the people of the region in fostering and preserving a favorable climate for foreign investments—not only to protect existing U.S. investment there but to attract new investment as well.

The United States also has a strong interest in curtailing the production and shipment of narcotics from or through the region to the United States. Prosperous and growing economies afford alternate opportunities and should reduce the incentives for the production and export of narcotics to the United States. Active engagement on the part of governments in fighting narcotics traffic is a disincentive to producers and shippers, and the CBI legislation calls for cooperation in this effort.

These are specific concrete examples of the way in which our national interests are served by the Caribbean Basin Initiative. We have a clear interest in preventing the emergence of a string of hostile states in this area.

The importance of the CBI to our national interest remains unchanged. There is a risk that, since the CBI is no longer new and is off the front pages, it may seem to be a passing fancy. That is not the case. This Administration continues to be strongly committed to promoting the economic development of the Caribbean Basin. Development serves our interest in stability and democracy in the Americas. There can be no clearer sign of the Administration's intent and of the President's personal commitment than the recent visit by the President to Grenada and the statements which he made there.

Moreover, the CBI goes beyond any particular U.S. Administration or personal presidential commitment. It will continue as an important part of U.S. foreign policy for its full 12 years because it reflects the fundamental interests of this nation. It was because of this overarching national interest that the program was passed by strong bipartisan majorities and continues to enjoy broad support.

State Department's Role

As a representative of the Department of State, let me say a few words on the role of the Department in the program; I know that this question is of interest to the committee.

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The Department has a principal role in both the policy formulation and implementation of the CBI. As the cochairman of the interagency policy subcommittee, the Department is involved in all aspects of the program direction of the initiative. Department personnel are also active in the subcommittee on implementation and in carrying out the policies agreed upon on an interagency basis. There are six priority areas for the Department's action.

Policy Formulation. The Department systematically analyzes the progress of the CBI and helps define on an interagency basis what our priorities should be in implementing the CBI. U.S. embassies in the region provide regular analyses and recommendations on how to improve implementation, drawing on contacts not only with host government officials but also with business and labor leaders. In Washington, the Department organizes quarterly conferences with the diplomatic representatives of beneficiary governments to discuss CBI implementation and policy proposals. Similarly, U.S. Government implementation plans are discussed with key private sector groups representing the United States, the CBI countries, and other cooperating countries. Along with several other U.S. agencies, the Department has sponsored for the past 9 years the annual Miami conference on the Caribbean. This conference brings together the private and public sectors for a thorough 3-day critical analysis of the CBI and, thus, serves as a major input into the policy formulation process; in addition, the conference provides a forum for traders and investors to explore business opportunities in the CBI region.

Policy Reform. The long-term aim of the CBI is to encourage sound economic policies that will effectively mobilize domestic resources to expand and diversify production. At present, many CBI countries still must rely to a large extent on external support, and particularly on concessional aid, to sustain their growth and to expand their productive base. However, our objectives are, first, that as these economies improve their export performance and strengthen their infrastructure, private equity flows will displace official aid flows as the primary external resource; and, second, that external flows become relatively less important as the domestic private sector becomes increasingly vigorous and innovative. In its policy dialogue with regional leaders, the State Department stresses the importance of a vigorous private sector and the need for a favorable environment for investors, both national and foreign. These are the fundamental preconditions for self-sustaining growth.

Each of the 21 beneficiary countries has its own specific program for taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the CBI. In turn, U.S. embassies, working closely with host government officials, formulate and implement an annual action plan based on the unique conditions in each country. Our embassies also evaluate beneficiary country programs and policies in relation to the eligibility criteria of the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act and work with beneficiary governments to avoid or correct any potential problems in this regard. Supplementing embassy activities, interagency teams of Washington officials have visited beneficiary countries several times to discuss host country and embassy CBI programs and to point out any possible shortcomings in meeting the provisions of the act. These teams also meet with private sector leaders to seek to develop a coordinated approach involving both private and public sectors. The teams also meet with the media to explain Administration programs to the general public.

Economic Assistance. One of the U.S. Government's major efforts in support of the CBI has been a steadily increasing program of economic assistance. Overall, our economic aid to the CBI region has about doubled since the program was announced, from $695 million in FY [fiscal year] 1982 to the $1.5 billion which we are requesting for FY 1987. A large part of this increase is directed to Central American countries, but I emphasize that the Central American program is not growing at the expense of the Caribbean. Our economic assistance to the Caribbean region only, excluding Central America, has increased from $337 million in FY 1982 to $385 million requested for FY 1987.

Not only the total flow to the region but also our objectives, our strategy, and the nature of our programs have been changing in response to the CBI. My colleague from AID [Agency for International Development] will give a detailed explanation of strategy and programs for the region, but I do want to emphasize three specific objectives for our assistance, which strongly support the CBI:

- To promote short-term economic and financial stabilization;
- To encourage production, trade, and investment in nontraditional exports; and
- To enhance production, management, and marketing capacities of the private sector.

Trade and Investment Promotion. The Department cooperates with other U.S. agencies to facilitate trade and investment between the United States and CBI beneficiary countries. This is a major concern for all our embassies in CBI countries. Each has a commercial section, headed either by a Department of Commerce or State official, to work closely with U.S. businesspeople and the host country private sector and government in promoting investment and trade. Frankly, more needs to be done in this area. CBI beneficiary exports to the United States have encountered some problems—as outlined in detail by Ambassador [and U.S. Trade Representative Clayton K.] Yeutter and Under Secretary [of Commerce for International Trade Bruce] Smart. In a related area, two specific measures which we are encouraging governments to take in order to attract additional economic activity (notably in the tourism sector) and to improve the investment climate are the negotiation of tax information exchange agreements, so as to benefit from the CBI's convention tax deduction, and to sign bilateral investment treaties.

Public Diplomacy. Broad public understanding of the CBI's goals are necessary to sustain the program over the long term. Second, potential investors must be informed about the program and the economic and political situation of the CBI countries. The Department has, consequently, given the region and the initiative priority attention in its public diplomacy activities. Department officers have spoken throughout the country on the CBI, either individually or together with other agency representatives, and we expect to expand these activities. In this regard, these hearings, together with other congressional public information activities, are most welcome. The President's recent trip to Grenada, of course, provided unique opportunities to explain to the U.S. and CBI public the purposes of the program and to underscore the U.S. commitment to the initiative. U.S. embassies, including particularly USIA [United States Information Agency] representatives, reinforce this message by regularly meeting with the host country press and interested groups to discuss CBI implementation.

Multilateral Support. The Department is actively encouraging strengthened multilateral support for the CBI.

Because of the committee's special interest in this issue, I would like to describe it in some detail.

Multilateral Support

There are four main targets of our efforts to encourage multilateral participation:

- The countries of the Caribbean rim;
- Other developed countries which take an active role in the region;
- Multilateral institutions; and
- Private sector participation from third countries.

Let us consider these in turn.

Caribbean Rim. When the President announced the initiative in 1982, he noted that four other countries were each intensifying their own efforts in support of economic development in the Caribbean Basin countries through programs which augment and complement the CBI. These efforts have continued.

- *Canada.* The Government of Canada announced its intention to double its bilateral aid to the Commonwealth Caribbean by 1987; it is well on its way to achieving this target. Canadian aid flows have also increased to Central America. Prime Minister Mulroney has also announced plans to implement by mid-1986 a preferential trade arrangement similar to the CBI for the Commonwealth Caribbean. Thus, shortly, we expect the Commonwealth Caribbean countries to have nearly unlimited trade access to the entire North American market.
- *Venezuela and Mexico.* Although these countries face considerable challenges in promoting their own economic development and resolving pressing debt service problems, they have continued their Joint Oil Facility, which offers special credit terms to nine petroleum-importing countries in the basin. These credits may also be converted to long-term development loans under certain conditions. Venezuela has extended assistance to the region and has helped Curacao by leasing the Shell petroleum refinery there for a 5-year period.
- *Colombia.* Colombia has offered special trade credits and technical assistance programs to several governments in the region and is exploring other ways to promote trade and investment. Although of modest scope compared to the U.S. and Canadian programs, the Colombian program is a substantial effort for a developing country and shows the interest of the Colombian Government in playing an active and constructive role in the Caribbean Basin.

Developed Country Participation. Over the past 4 years, the Department has intensified its consultations with key allies on Caribbean Basin policies and programs, with specific attention to the CBI. Examples of expanded multilateral cooperation include:

- The European Communities (EC) have several programs which predate the CBI. The most important program is the Lome Convention, which offers trade preferences for imports from the Commonwealth Caribbean countries—duty-free entry into the EC market for most goods produced in the beneficiary countries, as well as specific commodity protocols, some of which offer guaranteed prices for specified quantities of certain commodity exports of the beneficiary countries. The convention also provides for economic aid and other incentives for investment, tourist promotion, training, financial assistance for unforeseen export shortfalls of certain products, and technical cooperation. Department officers and our mission to the European Communities have consulted regularly with the EC member states and the European Commission to strengthen joint activities in the basin. In November 1985 the EC adopted a framework agreement with the Central American countries which makes a new commitment to assist Central America. The EC agreed to double its financial resource flows to the region over the next 5 years. We are exploring ways through which the EC and the United States might work together to promote increased investment and trade with Central America and help strengthen its regional institutions.
- The United Kingdom has organized several investment missions to the region, promoted the opportunities offered by the Lome Convention and the CBI for European businesspeople, and sustained its economic development assistance to the region.
- The Federal Republic of Germany has increased its aid flows to the region and is currently exploring ways to work with us to improve the investment environment in the region. It has also participated in joint seminars on the CBI in several German commercial centers.
- France has increased its aid to the region, especially to the East Caribbean, where it recently opened an embassy in St. Lucia. French authorities have collaborated with private sector groups to inform the French business community about the CBI.
- Dutch officials have urged their dependencies in the Netherlands Antilles to make full use of the CBI. They have collaborated in organizing several CBI seminars in Holland.
- Japan has recently intensified its CBI-related activities by increasing trade credits and developmental assistance to the basin and by organizing a joint private/public sector investment mission to several beneficiary countries in March.

Multilateral Institutions. For the past 8 years the U.S. Government has been supporting the Caribbean Group for Cooperation in Economic Development (CGCED), a consultative group led by the World Bank which involves over 30 donor countries and international institutions as well as some 15 Caribbean countries. It aims to strengthen international cooperation with regard to economic assistance to the region and to promote sound economic policies to improve the environment for investment and trade expansion. The CGCED, in short, performs a role which complements and supports the goals of the CBI. We are now exploring the organization of country-specific consultative groups for Central American countries which would hopefully have a similar complementary role.

Private Sector Cooperation. Private sector groups in some developed countries are active supporters of the CBI. The British West India Committee has been particularly active. For example, it organized a 50-member investment mission to the recent Miami Conference on the Caribbean and has hosted a series of seminars on the CBI in Great Britain. The committee now plans to direct its attention to engaging other European business groups in the region. Similarly, the Canadian Association-Latin America and the Caribbean has worked closely with U.S. agencies in promoting the CBI in Canada and in promoting Canadian business contacts with the region.

Improvements in the CBI

What I and other Administration witnesses have outlined represents, in our view, some significant progress under the CBI and a major effort within this Administration and by the other CBI participants to implement the program positively. There are, of course, some problems and issues. This committee has asked for our analysis of what needs to be changed to make the CBI more effective, including recommendations for legislative or administrative changes.

The problem which most concerns me is one which is not susceptible to specific legislative or administrative proposals but which I, nevertheless, want to highlight as an important issue.

This is the problem of frustration based on unrealistic expectations. Because this is a dramatic and unprecedented program, popular expectations in the Caribbean Basin have been and remain high. Clearly, the CBI is having an impact, but there is, as yet, little visible difference in living standards in the Caribbean Basin. As a result, we hear a certain amount of impatience with the program and with the economic model which the CBI represents.

How do we deal with this impatience? We must try to channel it into constructive forms. There is a kind of impatience that impels people to act—to attack the obstacles before them with new courage. There is another kind that makes people give up or pronounce their own and others' efforts a failure. That second kind is not only premature; it is tragic and self-fulfilling. That will cause investors to give up on the region also and not even to look at possible opportunities there. But the first kind of impatience is creative and energizing. I hope that the frustrations which we are seeing expressed in the region will impel everyone to reexamine and redouble their efforts.

On the part of the countries of the CBI region, that means a renewed determination to attack outmoded and distorting economic structures which have impeded their growth to date. Many governments have already undertaken programs to adjust their economies. But adjustment is a dynamic, not a static, process; one that requires continuing efforts and new approaches as opportunities develop or economic conditions change. As difficult as many of these adjustments have been and continue to be, they are indispensable. And we are beginning to see in some countries the first fruits of the sacrifices of the past few years, in terms of improved investor confidence and capital flows, increased exports, the restoration of growth, and improved job prospects. These countries must stick to their course, so that the full benefits of structural adjustment policies can be produced.

For our part in the United States, we need, above all, to keep our own economy vibrant and open. Our market and our resources are vast compared to the small economies of the Caribbean Basin, even taken together. But if our own economy falters, our ability to help our neighbors will suffer as well, and, of course, our market will offer fewer opportunities. Therefore, we will continue policies to keep our economy dynamic and innovative.

Above all, we must resist the easy—and terribly destructive—temptation of protectionism. Trying to resolve our problems by closing markets may seem like a solution, but, in fact, it only worsens the original problems by promoting inefficient and costly production. The ultimate solution to our trade problems is to work toward more open markets and more rational economic policies everywhere: in the United States, in the Caribbean Basin, and in the economies of our trading partners throughout the world.

This Administration is committed to an open and fair trading regime. Demonstrations of this commitment include President Reagan's recent decisions to reject the use of quotas on imports of shoes and copper. We are also actively working to organize another round of multilateral negotiations to liberalize further international trade in goods and services.

More specifically, we need to maintain the integrity of the CBI program. Clearly, as times change and as political problems develop on this or that issue, there will be pressures for revisions in the program. However, investors need a reasonable expectation of stability before they commit their capital and energy to a new venture. This Administration understands that and will defend the integrity of the program against changes that would weaken it. Let me emphasize that this is a commitment which comes from the very top. Two months ago, in Miami, Vice President Bush said that: "We in the Administration must, and we will, fight any proposal in any form that would inhibit the free flow of trade from the Caribbean." I ask this committee, which played an indispensable and leading role in securing passage of the CBI program, to also express its commitment to protecting the CBI program against protectionist revisions and preserving its integrity for its full 12 years.

At the same time, we must look for ways to enrich the initiative. And here I finally arrive at some specific actions which we can take administratively or through legislation. Several measures are already being implemented: improved opportunities for U.S. Government procurement and liberalized access for certain garments. Another measure will require legislation: expansion of investment opportunities under Section 936 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

Last November Vice President Bush announced the Administration's decision to waive for CBI countries certain requirements under U.S. law relating to the GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] Government Procurement Code. As a result, products exported by CBI countries will have a chance to compete for certain U.S. Government purchases which had previously been closed to them. I want to add today that the U.S. Government has developed a program to help businesses in CBI countries take advantage of these new opportunities by explaining to them the specific procedures and regulations governing U.S. procurement and offering them practical advice on how to enter this very complex and competitive market.

The President in Grenada announced a program of special importance to the region. We will implement soon a special program to provide greater access to the U.S. market for garments sewn in CBI countries from fabric manufactured and cut to pattern in the United States. This comes in response to repeated requests from CBI leaders emphasizing the importance of the labor-intensive assembly industry to their economies. Further, it responds to the interest of many U.S. investors to locate parts of their textile operations in neighboring countries where they could take advantage of the industrial opportunities there. This reflects the natural economic complementarity of the U.S. and Caribbean Basin economies; it will result in a product which meets consumer needs at an attractive price and is able to compete with products which are totally made outside the United States. It thus preserves jobs in the United States, even while creating jobs and promoting the economic development of our neighbors in the Caribbean Basin.

Another major improvement which is underway is the proposal endorsed by the House for encouraging cooperative production between Puerto Rico and CBI countries. This is an imaginative proposal which originally came from Puerto Rican Governor Hernandez Colon and reflects Puerto Rico's special status as a bridge between the mainland United States and the Caribbean Basin. Under the proposal approved by the House on Section 936 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, profits from U.S. investments in Puerto Rico can be further reinvested by the Puerto Rican Government Development Bank in active business assets in CBI countries and still receive a tax credit. This could provide a major boost to CBI countries, which remain starved for investment

and capital. I urge the Senate to join the House in approving this provision.

We need also to address the problem of sugar. Since the passage of the domestic support program for sugar, our imports of sugar have been declining and now are about half of what we imported prior to the program. The effects of the declining U.S. sugar quota on CBI countries is difficult to measure precisely, but it is clearly substantial in terms of lost foreign exchange earnings and employment. Sugar is a key export from the region; for example, it accounts for a third of the total foreign exchange earnings of the Dominican Republic.

When he signed the farm bill, the President made very clear his concern about the negative impact of our sugar program on CBI countries. The Administration is now studying several different approaches to mitigate these problems.

I understand the committee and possibly other interested Members may travel to the CBI region sometime this spring to take a firsthand look at what the CBI has accomplished and what needs to be done. I very much welcome such a firsthand exploration by the committee and offer any assistance which we or our embassies could provide to make the trip as productive as possible.

Concluding Overview

The CBI was born full of promise for the future for both us and for the region. Today, 2 years after implementation of the program, we have lived a small part of that future. How far have we come? How far do we have to go to fulfill the promise of more stable and integrated development?

I think the overall answer is simple: we have set a good course, but we have so far to go that the finish is not yet in sight. The challenge before us is great—self-sustaining prosperity built on a solid base of democratic institutions. But the resources which we collectively bring to this task are also great—the energies and talents of governments and private sector leaders in the United States, the Caribbean Basin, and in an impressive number of other countries interested in the region.

Let me review quickly my first question—how far have we come? Looking back over the years since this Administration first proposed the CBI, I see some major accomplishments in responding to our common goals and interests. The most important achievement has been the spread of democracy.

Despite several exceptions with which you are all familiar, the Caribbean Basin is now overwhelmingly characterized by democratic governments chosen as a result of orderly elections that expressed, in their freedom and competitiveness, the will of their respective peoples. There have been some dramatic turnarounds in favor of democracy: the beginning of the democratic process in Haiti; the return of Grenada to democratic institutions; and the opening of the political process in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala to popular choice. There have also been more "routine" elections in countries where democratic practices have long been honored, as in the parliamentary systems in the Caribbean or in Central America's strongest democracy, Costa Rica. My point is that democracy is stronger than ever. The majority of people in the Caribbean Basin now live under political systems which they have themselves chosen.

Self-determination and democracy are achievements of enormous importance in themselves. They are also crucial to the economic future of the region. As Secretary Shultz noted in a major speech to the Miami conference on the Caribbean in December 1984 [Current Policy No. 641], democracy and development go hand in hand. Despite the difficulties which democracies sometimes have in making decisions, over the long run a lasting and self-sustaining process of economic development can best be built through a system which rests on the consent of the governed and gives people faith in their institutions.

People must have faith in their institutions if there is to be economic growth. The failure of Cuba's command economy can be traced to a failure of Cuba's Marxist government to give people faith in Cuba's future. Cubans increasingly shudder at the bleakness that will prevail even by the year 2000 if the current regime continues. Without freedom, even Castro's call of last year for "10 years of austerity" will not bring a return to economic growth. Castro's eagerness to earn hard currency and "normalize" his relations with the West, thereby regenerating growth, comes from his belief that he can have both growth and the command economy. But he is missing the point, just as the Soviet Union and Nicaragua have: growth cannot come through political tyranny and total bureaucratic control. To reestablish a productive future, Cuba would, indeed, need to normalize relations with the West, but that cannot come without freedom as well.

We can all learn from the mistakes of the command economy. In simple terms, the lesson is that overbureaucratization is the death knell of initiative, investment, and growth.

Let's turn now to a review of economic progress in the Caribbean Basin. Although the region still faces major problems, some of which are beyond the control of the countries themselves, there has been considerable progress on the economic front in recent years. In Central America, the dramatic decline in the region's GNP [gross national product] has been arrested. The Caribbean Basin as a whole (excluding Nicaragua) grew 1%–2% in 1984 and is estimated to have grown modestly again in 1985. We are encouraged at this economic upturn, but we also see it as insufficient over the longer run. Clearly, greater economic progress is needed.

Perhaps the most important achievement of recent years has been a new spirit of private enterprise shared by both governments and the private sector. While it is impossible to quantify this, I believe most people who know the region sense a major change in attitudes. Increasingly, there is an awareness that it is the private sector which is overwhelmingly the source of investment, jobs, innovation, and growth. Increasingly, the role of government is seen as providing a framework within which the private sector can operate efficiently, rather than as the engine of economic activity.

This is a crucial change. For, although attitudes are unquantifiable, they are the basis for people's decisions and actions. If these attitudinal changes continue and grow, then the region ultimately will develop institutions which attract capital and technology, not repel it; which encourage innovation and risk-taking, not capital flight; which foster savings and investment, not decay and decline. ■

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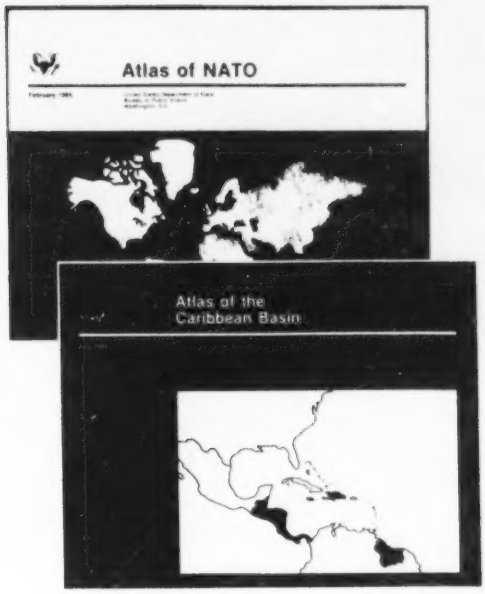
The *Atlas of the Caribbean Basin*, July 1984 (2d edition), consists of 16 pages of maps and charts showing the basin's economic and political features, such as political and economic alignments, the military balance, import sources and exports, immigration, and development assistance.



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